

PREVENTING SUMMER HEAT ILLNESS

Summer heat waves can be dangerous and life threatening. Very high body temperatures can result in damage to the brain or vital organs. Health conditions that may limit the body's ability to regulate temperature include old age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, poor circulation, sunburn and drug and alcohol use.

Here in New Hampshire we are usually more concerned about cold weather, but this year is different. We have had extended heat waves recently and more hot weather is coming. This is a reminder to pay attention to National Weather Service warnings and to be alert for heat stress, especially among high-risk people in your community, such as the elderly, low-income people and anyone who is physically frail or suffering from illness.

These tips have been compiled from the EPA, NH Office of Emergency Management, and the NH Health Officers Association.

To protect your health when temperatures are extremely high:

Drink Plenty of Fluid - Increase your fluid intake, especially water. Consult your doctor if you have been prescribed a fluid-restricted diet or prescription medications that affect the body's water retention (for example, diuretics). Avoid very cold beverages to prevent stomach cramps or drinks containing alcohol, which will actually cause you to lose more fluid. Do not drink alcohol to try to stay cool.

Eat light foods - Do not eat heavy, hot, or hard-to-digest foods.

Replace Salt and Minerals - Heavy sweating removes necessary salt and minerals from the body. To replace them, drink fruit juice or a sports beverage during exercise or any work in the heat. Do not take salt tablets unless directed by your doctor. If you are on a low salt diet, ask your doctor before changing your diet. .

Wear Appropriate Clothing and Sunscreen - Wear as little clothing as possible when you are at home. Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. In the hot sun, a wide-brimmed hat will keep the head cool. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids. It also causes pain and skin damage. A variety of sunscreens are available to reduce the risk of sunburn. Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) number of 15 or higher and follow package directions.

Pace Yourself - If you are unaccustomed to working or exercising in hot weather, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound or leaves you gasping for breath, stop activity, get into a cool or shady area, and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak or feel faint.

Stay Cool Indoors - The most efficient way to beat the heat is to stay in an air conditioned area. If you don't have an air conditioner or evaporative cooling unit, visit a shopping mall or public library for a few hours. Do not rely on electric fans as the primary cooling device during a heat wave. If the temperature is in the high 90s or higher, a fan will not prevent heat-related illness. A cool shower or bath is a more effective way to cool off.

Schedule Outdoor Activities Carefully - If you must be out in the heat, plan your activities so that you are outdoors either before noon or in the evening. While outdoors, rest frequently in a shady area. Minimize exposure to the sun.

Use a Buddy System - When working in the heat, monitor the condition of your coworkers and have someone do the same for you. If you are 65 years of age or older, have a friend or relative call to check on you twice a day during a heat wave. If you know anyone in this age group, check on them at least twice a day.

Do not leave children and pets alone in cars for any amount of time.

HEAT STROKE and HEAT EXHAUSTION

Heat stroke occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. Warning signs include high body temperature, dizziness, nausea, confusion or unconsciousness; red, hot, dry skin, rapid pulse or throbbing headache.

Heat exhaustion is the body's response to an excessive loss of water and salt contained in sweat. Warning signs include heavy sweating, cramps, headache, nausea, paleness, tiredness and dizziness.

What to Do If you see signs of heat stroke or exhaustion call for immediate medical assistance and:

- * Get the victim to a shady area.
- * Cool the victim with water.
- * Monitor body temperature; continue cooling until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.
- * Do not give the victim alcohol to drink.
- * If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital ER for further instructions.

Your best defense against heat-related illness is prevention. Staying cool and making simple changes in your fluid intake, activities, and clothing during hot weather can help you remain safe and healthy.